THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE'S NEWS AND REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS

The Third Person Plural

By Burton Rascoe

. . . "The great point is never to admit it's only you who are talking. The modern Jeremiah or Charlie Sniff accordingly rents a small office, and sells his opinions on to paper as fast as he can; and then instead of signing them C. Sniff, he signs them The Editor. The Editor is a self-bestowed title, yet people respect it. They observe that any man who is an editor takes himself seriously. And not only himself, but other editors—he takes them all seriously—they all pretend to take each other that way, same as Kings or High Priests. They quarrel, and they criticize each other, but that doesn't hurt—the main thing is for each of them to speak of himself by his title, and never allude to himself as 'I' or to his views as 'my' views, but to call himself 'We,' so as to sound like a bishop or king."—Clarence Day jr., in "The Crow's Nest."

A CONTEMPORARY critic of baseball, books and "movies" views with alarm the literary situation at Harvard, his alma mater. It appears from his lament that since the Haughton regime at Cambridge the crimson dome has turned to ivory, and though Harvard's athletic stars are in the ascendant, its æsthetic flame has flickered out. The Harvard Stadium is full of bruisers, but poets are perched on the Old Yale fence. While Harvard is turning out hefty halfbacks Yale is giving a grateful world its Benéts, Stewarts and Farrars.

Our critic has erudition, and he calls history to witness in warning against this deplorable state of affairs. "Sparta had such an excellent line-smashing attack that it produced no poets. German militarism had begun to put hobnails into the novel." The situation was not always thus. There was a time when "Yale halfbacks might be faster than our ends, but Harvard wits could run circles around anybody from New Haven. They were the Romans and we the Greeks. Our goal line might belong to Yale, but our soul belonged to art."

Recalling dimly that Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg attended Knox, Ben Hecht the Everleigh School, and that Sherwood Anderson, Joseph Hergesheimer, Vachel Lindsay, Floyd Dell, Maxwell Bodenheim and Francis Hackett never really went to school at all, and recalling that not one really first rate and not many second literary artists in Europe are university graduates, we were disposed to regard this comical lamentation as an elaborate, sophisticated jest. Most of the artists we have known who survived college are making efforts against many handicaps to live the fact down. But both Harvard and Yale men assure me that our critic is in earnest, and their grave concern with the problem lends some color to their assertion.

We are urged to put in a word for Harvard against its defamer and we are presented with the facts. We are nothing if not obliging, and so for once we shall stick on a frat pin, turn up the cuffs of our trousers, put on a sophomore cap and give three Rahs for Harvard.

For we are told, what we never suspected, namely, that on "The Harvard Monthly" there was not so long ago a staff made up of Robert Nathan, Gilbert Seldes, John Dos Passos, E. E. Cummings, Robert Hillyer and Stewart Mitchell. Here is diversified talent surely. Nathan at twenty-eight is the author of two novels and a book of beautiful verse, and one of his novels, "Autumn," is, we believe, one of the very finest literary achievements in recent years. Seldes is literary critic for and the managing editor of "The Dial." Dos Passos is only twenty-three, or younger, and is the author of "Three Soldiers," "Rosinante to the Road Again" (a charming collection of essays), another novel soon to be published, and a volume of verse. Cummings is a modern artist, and the author of curious poems which figure occasionally in the more advanced publications. Stewart Mitchell published last year a volume of collected poems, and has written some excellent essays on Shelley and others. And Hillyer is a poet who won the Scandinavian scholarship and was for a time, in effect, the American literary ambassador to the Scandinavian countries.

Moreover, we learn that Kenneth Macgowan, the author of "The Theater of To-morrow," and Hiram K. Moderwell, author of "The Theater of To-day"; Conrad Aiken and T. S. Eliot are recently out of Harvard. Even Eugene O'Neill stuck it out there for a few weeks. If Harvard produced Eliot, Nathan, Dos Passos and Aiken, we should believe that their stay there was justified. But we do not think it did.

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PIERRE LOVING has, in the current "Nation," an interesting article on this same thing—the question of the influence of environment and contacts upon the development of talent. He attempts to account for the phenomenon of Chicago's literary activity. He attempts to explain how it came about that the ugly, dirty, sprawling city has produced in the work of Dreiser, Henry Blake Fuller, Frank Norris, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Ben Hecht, Maxwell Bodenheim, Vachel Lindsay and Alfred Kreymborg almost the only vigorous and distinctive literature of recent times in America, the only American literature, with few exceptions, which challenges comparison with contemporary literature in Europe.

He hits upon the obvious answer. Chicago is physically a larger city than New York. Writers rarely meet one another because distances separate them and there are not many of them. The hideous architecture, the drab, material aspect of the town, the dirt and noise drive the sensitive man in upon himself and make him create beauty for himself to supply the depressing lack of it about him, or to turn into beauty, as do Sandburg, Anderson and Hecht, the very ugliness they encounter. Again, and most important, perhaps, is that the hog butchering, steel and wheat mongering town is not aware of the artists it possesses. It offers him scant media of expression—one endowed poetry magazine and the columns of one or two newspapers. It baffles, handicaps and discourages the artist at every turn. And the real artist survives this, and is the stronger for it, because he expresses himself to satisfy a need. The unfortunate thing about it is that the men of weaker will and smaller talent are beaten in this unequal battle. That is why Chicago does not possess so many flourishing mediocrities as does New York. New York is hospitable to talent provided it is accompanied by a certain social grace. It has its Coffee House and Dutch Treat clubs, its incredible Algonquin lunch table so advantageously placed that hero worshippers may look on while the city's thinkers and poets are at their meals and playful jests. It has its National Arts and MacDowell clubs, where one may hear almost any one who has written a book explain how he came to do it. And it has its university chairs of criticism, where one may sit attendance while Professors Broun, Woollcott and John Farrar expound the theory of literature and the drama.

We recommend for this week the following books:

"Mr. Prohack," by Arnold Bennett—As possessing more charm than any other novel Bennett has written, as a mellowed and mature bit of almost imperceptible irony, so whimsical and warmly human is it, and as an unusual depiction of the effect of the acquisition of wealth upon an industrious, intelligent and kindly man.

"White and Black," by H. A. Shands—As being perhaps even a finer presentation of the negro and his relations with the whites in the South than T. S. Stribling's excellent "Birthright"; as containing the most accurate transcription of the negro's use of English that has yet got into print, and as being at once an important presentation of the negro problem and a well rounded, poignant and impressive novel.

"The Fair Rewards," by Thomas Beer—As a distinctive achievement in prose writing; as an interpretative presentation of the theatrical life of New York during a barbarous era, and as human drama beautifully handled by a young and new writer who has attained a mature and civilized point of view.

"Maria Chapdelaine," by Louis Hemon—As being a notable picture of provincial life, drawn with regard to the whole truth rather than for emphatic half truths; as being an interesting and impressive story, written lucidly, simply and with faultless taste.

"The Mind in the Making," by James Harvey Robinson—As being a succint and well written sketch of the evolution of ideas from the dawn of the human race to the present time; as a wise and helpful book for any reader who would like to get an intellectual perspective upon the problems concerning society and individual conduct to-day; as a remarkable compendium of the ideas by which men have been and are swayed.

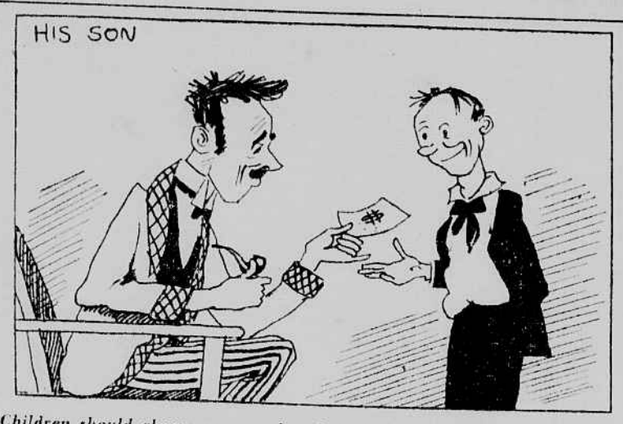
"Introducing Irony," by Maxwell Bodenheim—As being the most unusual and distinctive volume of poetry of the season; as being the second volume of a poet whom we find to be one of the five most interesting and

(Continued on Page 9)

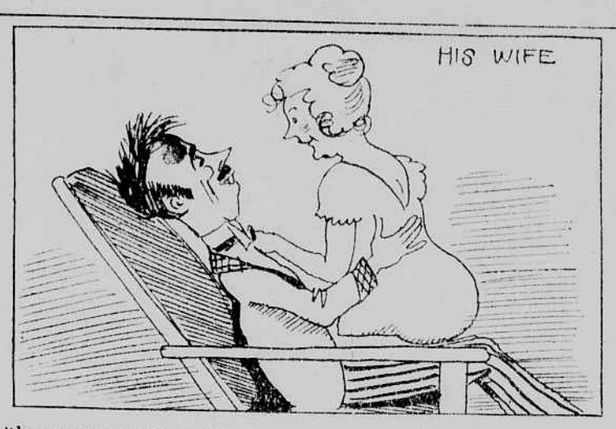
Wonder What a Really Wealthy Man Thinks About? : : : :

With Apologies to BRIGGS

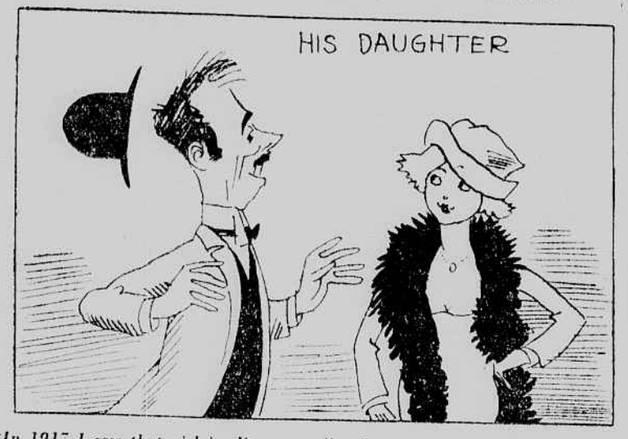
Text from "Mr. Prohack," Arnold Bennett's new novel, published by Doran.



"Children should always assume that their fathers have mysterious stores of money and that nothing is beyond their resources, and if they don't rise to every demand it's only because in their inscrutable wisdom they deem it better not to. Or it may be from mere cussedness."



"You may annoy me. You may exasperate me. You are frequently unspeakable. But you have never made me unhappy. And why? Because I am one of the few exponents of romantic passion left in this city. My passion for you transcends my reason."



"In 1917 I saw that girl in dirty overalls, driving a thundering great van down Whitehall. Yesterday I met her in her foolish high heels and her shocking openwork stockings and her negligible dress and her exposed throat and her fur stole, and she was so delicious and so absurd and so futile and so sure of her power that—that—well, that chit has the right to ruin me—not because of anything she's done, but because she is."

"Let us examine the circumstances. You want to marry Sissie. Do you imagine that after my daughter had expressed her view of you by kissing you I could fail to share that view? You have a great opinion of Sissie, but I doubt whether your opinion of her is greater than mine. We will now have a little whisky together."

Miss Johnston's "Silver Cross"

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Mr. Howden Smith is the author of "The Doom Trail," just published by Brentano.

SILVER CROSS. By Mary Johnston. Little, Brown & Co., Boston.

ONE of the most interesting literary phenomena of the day is the recrudescence of the historical novel. I do not mean by this that there is any reason to suppose that its extraordinary—and ridiculous—vogue of twenty years ago is about to be repeated, but that it has become apparent within the last year that the United States, like the British Isles several years earlier, has developed a growing tendency to appreciate really worth-while fiction that treats intelligently of bygone social epochs.

This is a good sign; in its way as strong an indication of a rising standard of national taste as the success of the younger generation of realists, who are presenting with journalistic detail the problems of their own time. And, by the way, that last statement leads me to pose the proposition that all novels which deal with group traits, tendencies, schools of thought, idiosyncrasies, might justly be termed historical novels, inasmuch as they attempt to reflect the life of a certain era.

In other words, "Main Street" and "The Beautiful and Damned" are tainted by the once abhorred stigma as much as Miss Johnston's book, which happens to discuss the terrible moral degeneration of the monastic establishments in Tudor England, which made possible the early success of the Reformation.

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"SILVER CROSS" is by no means a great book, but it is an extremely interesting book, a brave book, noteworthy for its keen perception of the irony of faith, the bludgeon force of established power in overriding inimical truth. The psychological interplay of its characters is always correct, their spiritual reactions are essentially valid. And yet they do not live for me. The monk Richard Englefield and Morgen Fay, the courtesan, are vivid images that lack the warm human touch without which characters are—characters. For this, I think, Miss Johnston's peculiar style must be held responsible.

This style—at any rate, to her fellow craftsmen—is the most amazing feature of the book. It represents a bold attempt at a drastic departure from accepted literary conventions. Without the incoherent eccentricities of Waldo Frank's "Rahab," it contrives to present a series of startlingly realistic portraits with the utmost economy of language and in unvarying novel form. Ironical always, Miss Johnston scorns to assist the mentally lazy by filling in the details of her pictures. A few broad strokes, splashes of vibrant color—and there it is. Use your imagination, if you have any. If you haven't, you can leave it. The effect is rather Whistlerian.

"For instance, she starts her story: "Henry the Seventh sat upon the throne."

That is all. No pointing out of the significance of this fact. No indication of the waxing commercial prosperity which followed the termination of the Wars of the Roses and was to flower in the splendid achievements of Elizabeth's reign; no reference to the consequent strengthening of the crown, which was to make possible the eighth Henry's defiance of Pope and Church. These belong in the picture, but Miss Johnston scorns to pander to the ignorant mind.

Of her descriptive style, curt, telegraphic, disconcerting even, this is a fair sample:

"Monk of Silver Cross was gone, whirled away to the dark country behind Chaos and there dead and buried peacefully. Here was Richard Englefield the master goldsmith. And yet not that either. Here was one who had risen behind goldsmith and monk, who had come up like a tree that was not suspected."

And this:

"London folk went up and down. Palace where sat a strong king. Tower where traitors lay in ward, wall maintained through the centuries upon the base the Romans laid. Aldgate, Newgate, Ludgate, Bishopsgate. London Bridge, London Stone, Baynard Castle, old Temple without the Templars, with the lawyers. Blackfriars, Whitefriars, Greyfriars, Austin Friars, Crutched Friars, crowd of monasteries and nunneries, great buildings of stone, lesser buildings of wood, churches and churches, and a good way out of town Westminster, where the King was building his great chapel with the wonderful roof. Sixty thousand, maybe seventy thousand people in London. Learned men were there, artists were there, merchants were there, men of the church, of the law, of the sword. Hidden Wickliffites, hidden Lollards were there. Astrologers and alchemists were there and men of the rosy cross. Navigators and discoverers were there, striving to show Henry what to do to balance or counter Ferdinand of Spain and Emmanuel of Portugal. Mechanics and artisans were there, many and many men of many crafts. Guilds and guilds. London of the bells, of the wall and the Thames; London outer, London inner."

Three hundred pages could not give a clearer description than that for the reader who can use imagination.

Book Gossip

Athertonisms

Gertrude Atherton is one of the few women authors who can turn an epigram, and hers are so individual that they have been called "Athertonisms." Here are three from her new novel, "Sleeping Fires":

"Good women always have a fatal weakness for the man who has lived too much."

"Wives have means of extracting secrets that no husband has the wit to elude, men being too ingenuous to follow the circumlocutory method of the subtler sex."

"A good woman loves only her husband."

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Elizabeth Asquith has arranged with her American publishers for a new volume of stories said to be similar to "I've Only Myself to Blame." She is now on her way back home with her mother, Margot, who is to have before long a volume of her impressions of the United States.

The Negro as Artist

By Louis Untermeyer

THE BOOK OF AMERICAN NEGRO POETRY. Chosen and edited by James Weldon Johnson. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

IF THEY are right—the prophets who predict the eventual submersion of the white race in a "rising tide of color"—this decade may come to be known as the first black renaissance. Even without the perspective of time, we can see how curiously this generation has been influenced by the dark strain. African sculpture has made a powerful impress on the art of our day. American music reflects, in an increasing strength, the savage insistence of Congo drum beats, as well as the syncopated poignance of our Southern spirituals. In sociology the negro has begun to be his own interpreter. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, editor of "The Crisis," has made two important contributions to the psychology of the suppressed race in "The Souls of Black Folk" and "Darkwater." Benjamin Brawley, author of that excellent handbook, "A Short History of the English Drama," has done splendid pioneer's work with his "The Negro in Art" and "A Social History of the American Negro."

In literature the field is more uneven. In *belles lettres*, criticism and purely creative work the negro seems to suffer from an inhibition that prevents him from expressing his own emotions. Instead of giving free rein to a vision sharply differentiated from that of his white compatriots, he is content to ape their gestures, their inflections—too anxious to imitate with a stammering complaisance their own imitations. Instead of being proudly race conscious, he is too often merely self-conscious.

A Harlem Freud may some day rise to explain this quality in terms of mass repression; the negro as artist suffers, he may conclude, from a race inferiority complex. The implications of such an analysis are too deep and far-reaching for an article as superficial as this. They would, however, find repercussions in a recently published collection of poems chosen and edited by James Weldon Johnson, himself a poet, as was proved by his original volume, "Fifty Years."

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"THE BOOK OF NEGRO POETRY" is a record of the successes as well as the failures of the American negro (or, as Mr. Johnson prefers to call him, the Aframerican) as poet. Here are lyrics as native, as genuinely emotional, as "A Death Song" and "Little Brown Baby," by Paul Laurence Dunbar, and here, also, are verses as maudlin and imitative as "Ships That Pass in the Night" by the same writer. Here are rhapsodies as passionate as "A Litany of Atlanta," by W. E. Du Bois, and quatrains as cryptic as the obviously Robinsonian echoes of that ardent anthologist, William Stanley Braithwaite. Fenton Johnson adopts, without hesitation or apology, Masters's Spoon River idiom, but his angry intensity is his own.

The outstanding discoveries of this collection are two, and they are less familiar—even to their own race. They are Claude McKay and Anne Spencer. McKay does not disguise either himself or his poetry; his lines are saturated with a people's passion; they are colored with a mixture of bitterness and beauty. McKay's quieter and idyllic moments are less noteworthy; his muse is more characteristic when she is rebellious than resigned. This singer does not mistake polemics for poetry; he knows how to evoke a power of communication without shouting at the top of his voice. "The Lynching" proves this. So does the impulsive sonnet, "To the White Fiends," and this significant outcry, written during the recent race riots:

IF WE MUST DIE

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!

Anne Spencer's work sounds the other extreme of the gamut. Her verse is remarkably restrained, closely woven, intellectually complex. "The Wife-Woman" and "Translation" are steeped in a philosophy that has metaphysical overtones. But there is a racial opulence, an almost barbaric heat in the color of her lines.

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THE names of Alex Rogers, J. W. Johnson and Paul Dunbar—all of whom wrote well known lyrics for popular songs like "Lover's Lane," "Nobody" and "The Jonah Man"—recall the negro composers who promised so much and who have performed so little. Will Marion Cook, one of the ablest musicians ever produced in America, startle us with the amazing "Rain Song," originally written for a Williams and Walker show.

H. T. Burleigh is another negro composer who apparently has been ruined by the conservatories. W. C. Handy must be given credit for an entire tendency which originated with his "Memphis Blues." What has happened to him? Or to Rosamond Johnson, most adroit of ragtime adapters? Or to Nathaniel Dett, whose "Listen to de Lambs" is one of the most eloquent pieces of choral writing ever scored by an American? Is the answer to be found, in spite of the negro's bursts of enthusiasm and gusto, in his lack of sustained effort? In a sheer inability to cope with the strain of continued creative effort?

In short, is this almost equal alternation of achievement and failure a physical or a psychical thing? This collection poses such questions even though it does not pretend to supply the answers. What it does supply is a full sized portrait of the American negro's contribution to a definitely American art. It shows that if the Aframerican has not yet had his renaissance, his poetry has at least passed its pains of parturition. It is no discredit to him that, with two exceptions, the most balanced and cumulative contribution to this compilation is Mr. Johnson's forty-page preface. It is a mark of which any group could allow itself to be proud.